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AUTHOR Thompson, Loraine
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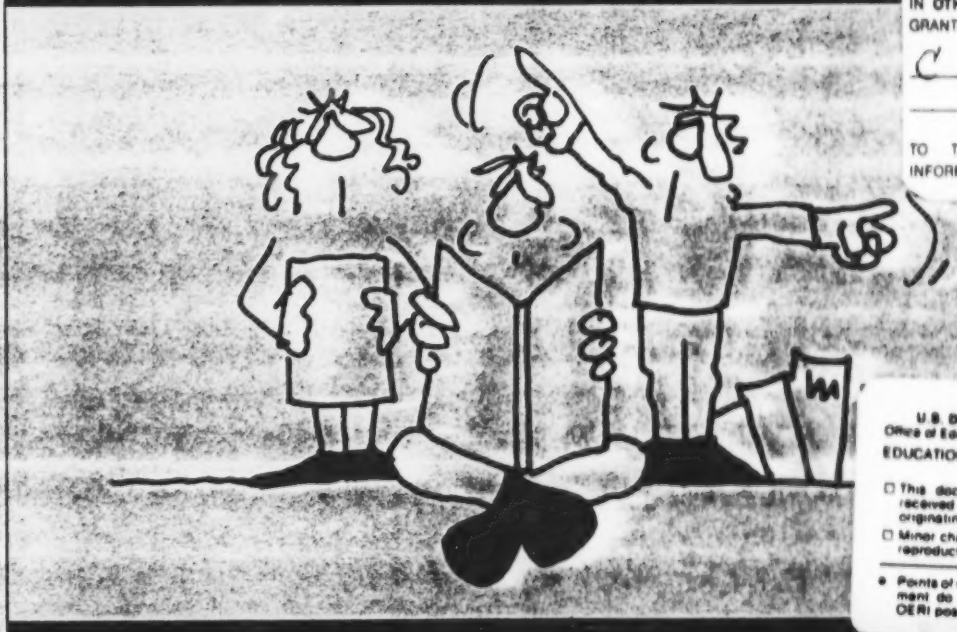
ABSTRACT

This booklet provides practical exploration of the use of narrative in the classroom with students and in teachers' personal and professional development. The various narrative forms are described in boxes throughout the booklet and include letter writing, storytelling, autobiographical accounts and several others. There are four "Your Turn" boxes that lead the reader through construction of a narrative, analysis, and reflection. These model the processes that are suggested for use with students or in professional development. After an introductory section, the first section discusses why a teacher might use narrative in the classroom and in their own professional development. The next section describes the importance of modeling and setting an example for students. A section on using narrative in content areas explains that narrative can summarize knowledge. The next section looks at guiding the construction of narratives and offers several examples of student narratives constructed in different ways. The next section looks at use of narratives for skill development and personal reflection. The following section discusses how to demonstrate that narratives are valued. A section on evaluation urges that evaluation be directly tied to the narrative's purpose. (Contains 22 references.) (JB)

Tell Me a Story!



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NARRATIVE IN THE CLASSROOM

Instructional Strategies Series No. 15

SDRC

ED 380 424

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Prepared for

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and

The Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit

by

Loraine Thompson Information Services Limited

Artist — Debb Black

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Juanita Ingham	SIDRU Staff, University of Regina
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Jeff Orr	Faculty of Education, University of Regina
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Dear Barb,

Just got back from a cross-country ski trip to Prince Albert. The Ski Club organizes several of these trips every year. This trip, a truly remarkable thing happened. One of the "old boys" in the club put his arm around me and said that if there was an award for most improved skier, I should get it.

This got me thinking about how I got to where I am now. When I first started skiing three years ago, I felt that I'd never "get it". At the ski lessons, I'd spend the whole day practicing two or three very simple, basic techniques, while the rest of the class went on to bigger and grander things. Even as I struggled, however, I noticed small improvements and was able to build on them and feel some satisfaction in them. I can learn; I just need a lot more practice than most people do. The other people in the Ski Club were really helpful. No one ever criticized me; their assistance was usually in the form of demonstration or direct instructions to move my arms and legs in a particular way.

You're probably wondering why this particular incident has so much meaning for me - why I decided to describe it in such detail. It has meaning for me because I related it back to my teaching and to schools in general. In schools, we often organize things so that students have to master a given amount of content in a given time or else they "fail". If such a system were applied to learning to ski, I would experience nothing but failure, because it takes me so long to learn. However, because I went at my own speed and didn't have to fit into any arbitrary timelines, I actually did quite well.

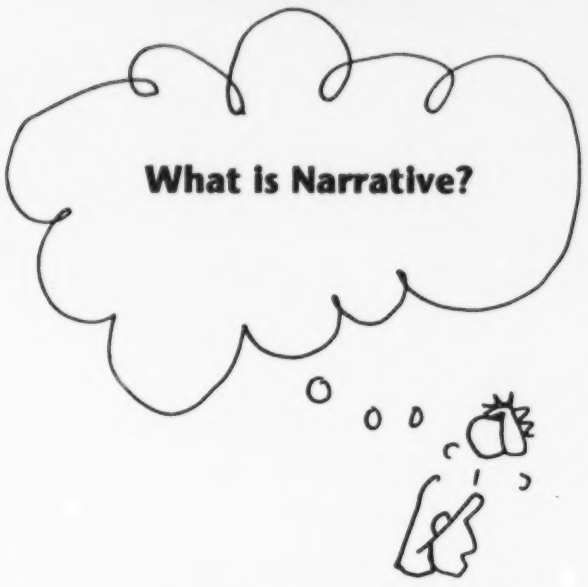
In schools, students who "fail" often have to go back to the beginning of a program. If this had happened to me, I never would have gotten anywhere, because there would have been much less opportunity to build on my small successes. I would have found going over techniques that I had already mastered boring and eventually would have quit altogether.

Now, I'm busy thinking about ways that I can organize my teaching so that students can feel the same satisfaction in their achievements that I do in my skiing. Certainly, I cannot change a system which has "failure" built into it, but, at the same time, there are many things I can change.

Bye for now.

Affectionately,
Loraine

Introduction



The letter that appears at the beginning of this booklet is an example of narrative. The writer of the letter describes an experience that had great meaning for her, reflects upon what she learned from that experience, and applies that learning to another situation.

Narrative has been defined as "**the symbolic presentation of a sequence of events connected by subject matter and related by time**".[1] Narratives are one of the most important ways of representing complex human experience.

Narrative is a way of giving meaning to our experience. It helps us to capture experiences that are meaningful to us and to make sense of our lives. We choose to tell or to write about experience A rather than experience B, because A has more meaning for us than B. The process of constructing a narrative requires that we sort out the important from the unimportant, the relevant from the irrelevant.

It is necessary to determine what the meaning of each event is to you and to analyze the relationship between events in order to decide whether the event should be included in the narrative and the amount of emphasis it should receive.

Narratives provide a means of structuring experience so that it has order and coherence. When developing a narrative it is necessary to describe events in a sequence. This sequence isn't necessarily chronological; events may be sequenced in order of importance or according to themes. The important point is that the act of constructing a narrative requires that the storyteller organize events in a manner that is personally meaningful.

Narratives promote personal and social growth. When we deliberately tell and retell the events in our own lives, we gain a deeper understanding of those events and of the way that they have influenced us.

Narrative is a way of giving meaning to shared experience. In many societies, including that of Canada's First Nations peoples, the accumulated knowledge of the society is held in the collective memory of the people and is shared through oral narrative. Culture is transmitted from one generation to another, and moral values and mores of behaviour are taught in this way. History, too, is conveyed through narrative. National, regional, community and family history become part of the oral tradition.[2] For societies with an oral tradition, narrative is a way of giving meaning to collective experience as well as to individual experience.

Many writers use the terms story and narrative synonymously. They suggest that stories can be told through narrative forms such as letters and journal writings as well as through the structure of a formal story.

Many researchers suggest that narratives parallel the way that people think. People think of their lives as a series of stories. When they tell something of their experience either to themselves or to others, they do so in the form of a story. For this reason people are sometimes said to have "many-storied" lives.

Narrative is both product and method. Journal entries, letters and stories told aloud are narrative products, but narrative in its broader meaning is a way of inquiring into human experience.

Organization of This Booklet

- Narrative can be used in the classroom with students; it also has an important role in teachers' personal growth and professional development. Throughout this booklet, these two uses of narrative are discussed together, as there is considerable overlap and the process used is similar for both.
- The various forms that narrative can take including letter writing, storytelling, autobiographical accounts and several others are described in boxes throughout this booklet.
- There are four **Your Turn** activity boxes in this booklet. These boxes will lead you through construction of a narrative, analysis of that narrative and reflection upon it. The **Your Turn** boxes model the process that you might use with your students when you are helping them construct narratives.

Why Use Narratives?

Narrative in the Classroom

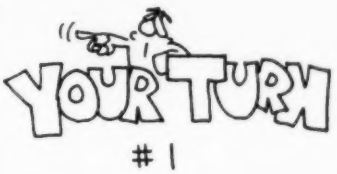
Narrative can be used for a variety of purposes in the classroom. The way that the narrative is introduced, structured and evaluated will depend upon the purpose for which it is being used.

1. Giving Meaning to Experience

Narrative is a way of giving meaning to experience. It helps us distinguish those events and experiences that are meaningful to us from those that are not, and to organize experiences, in thought and in word, so that they make sense to us.

The process of narrative doesn't stop after the story has been told or the letter written. Reflecting upon the narrative helps us learn through the experience recounted and to apply that learning to other situations.

Personal narratives give meaning to personal experience. But not all narratives are personal. Some traditional narratives reflect the beliefs, values and history of specific groups of people. Narratives of this type give meaning to the collective experiences of that community.



1

Construct a written or oral narrative about something that has meaning for you. Your narrative can focus on a theme, a situation, an event, or your thoughts, feelings and reactions. Some possibilities include:

- why I became a teacher
- a turning point in my career
- my most/least successful learning experience
- a student I'll always remember
- a teaching success or horror story[3]

Use any of the narrative forms described in this booklet.

If you construct an oral narrative, record it on audio- or videotape.

If you construct a written narrative, record it on a separate sheet of paper.

2. Affirming the Individual Child

The foundation of contemporary education is the individual child. Educators talk about meeting the needs of the individual. Curriculum guides are full of suggestions for adapting programs for the individual learner. Encouraging children to tell their stories through narrative is a way of showing that we value them as individuals; that their experiences, thoughts and reflections are valid and important.

3. Developing Skills

Narrative facilitates the development of several important skills. Both oral and written narrative forms require that children identify the important points they want to make and then organize those points in an order that makes sense to them. Narrative allows children to elaborate major points through the use of detail and example. It gives opportunities to work with grammar and sentence structure, and with literary devices such as alliteration. Oral narrative also gives children opportunities to grow in confidence when speaking in front of others and to develop public speaking skills such as voice variations, gesture, expression and the dramatic pause.

4. Developing Subject Area Content

Narrative offers a medium through which subject area content can be synthesized and summarized. When used in this manner, it forces the writer or storyteller to make connections between diverse, but related, pieces of information.

5. Learning from Traditional Narratives

The culture and tradition of the First Nations peoples is frequently conveyed through narrative. Traditional narratives have an important role in the teaching of history and literature. They help all students better appreciate and understand the rich heritage of the First Nations peoples.

6. Getting Insight into How Children Learn

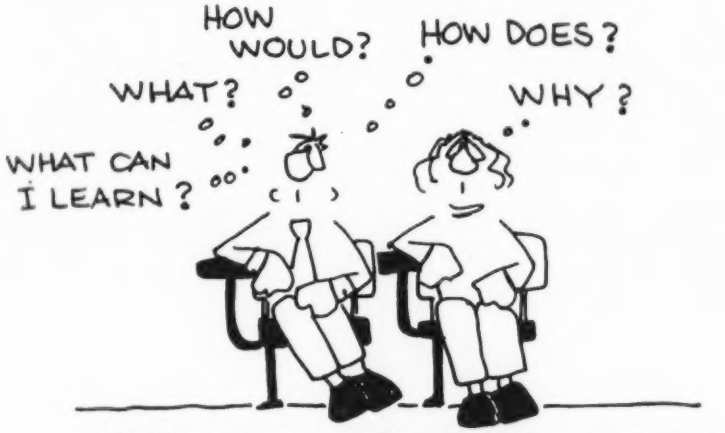
Using narrative in the classroom gives both the teacher and the children valuable insight into the way that children learn. Narrative also provides information about the way that children feel about their classroom experiences.

Students sometimes comment on their classroom experiences in their journal entries or stories. They might say that they enjoyed a particular lesson or that they learned a lot from a specific educational experience. They might also describe educational experiences that were boring or made them feel stupid. From these student comments, you can learn a lot about what works and what doesn't, from a student's point of view.

Narrative for Professional Development

Narrative is a way of structuring experience so that it has order and coherence. It is also a way of giving meaning to our experience. Narrative is particularly appropriate as a tool for professional development because the act of teaching is a complex social event. It is not easily reduced to simple, linear explanations. Narrative allows us to describe our experiences to ourselves and others in terms that are rich, detailed and interrelated.

Sharing narratives with other teachers helps you realize that you aren't alone. Other teachers face problems similar to the ones that you face. Other teachers get the same satisfaction from teaching and experience the same joy when a student "gets it". You discover that



many other teachers ask themselves the same kinds of questions about professional practice that you do.

When you share narratives with others, you learn from their experiences and save yourself some of the time and energy associated with trial and error. You might learn a new way of presenting particular content. You might add to your repertoire of techniques for dealing with various behaviour problems; or, you might learn more about using humour to keep lessons interesting and to handle behaviour problems in a nonconfrontational way.

Narratives may focus on the technical aspects of teaching or on broader questions related to teaching and learning. "Why do I hold the beliefs that I do about children and education?" "What role does a teacher play in a student's life? What role should a teacher play?" "What is the relationship between student achievement and student learning?"

Constructing your own narratives and sharing the narratives of your colleagues may help you better understand how you became the kind of teacher you are and how you might grow to become the kind of teacher that you want to be.

Set a Good Example

Being a role model is an important part of teaching. Students, consciously and unconsciously, pattern their behaviour after yours. When you use narratives as part of your teaching, you are illustrating the importance of this method of sharing information. You are also providing students with models that they can follow when constructing their own narratives. The story below describes how one teacher used narrative for these purposes.

Margaret Erasmus' grade three class is going swimming next week. A few days before the big day, Gregory's mother phones Margaret.

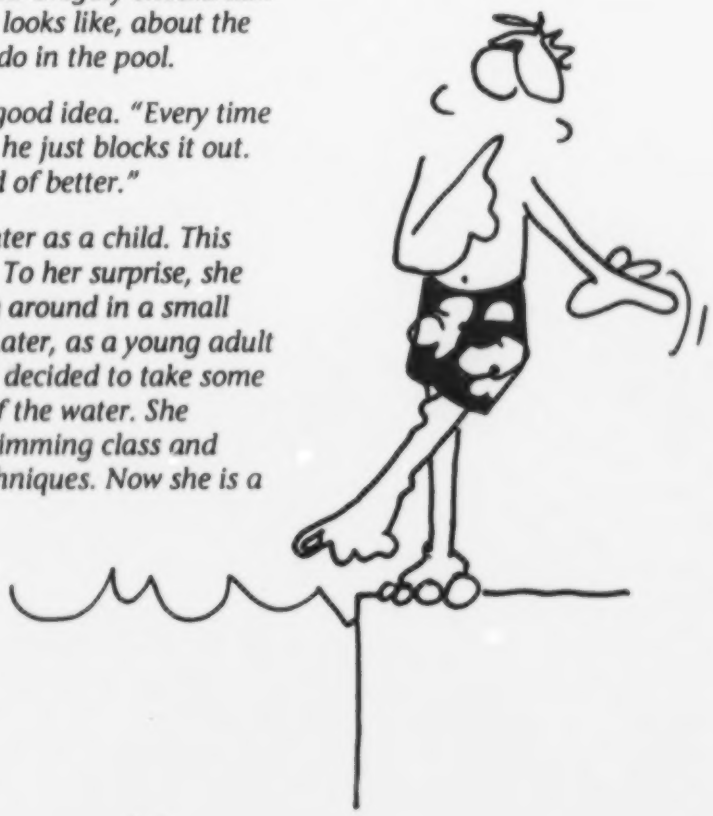
"Gregory's terrified of the water," she reports. "Can he please just put on his bathing suit and sit at the edge of the pool?"

Margaret suggests that perhaps she and Gregory should talk about swimming, about what the pool looks like, about the kind of activities that the children will do in the pool.

Gregory's mom doesn't think this is a good idea. "Every time we try to talk to him about swimming, he just blocks it out. Talking seems to make it worse instead of better."

Margaret, herself, was afraid of the water as a child. This started to change when she was eight. To her surprise, she found that after a summer of paddling around in a small wading pool, her fear was much less. Later, as a young adult attending Simon Fraser University, she decided to take some deliberate steps to overcome her fear of the water. She enrolled in an "absolutely terrified" swimming class and spent a lot of time practicing basic techniques. Now she is a strong, skilled swimmer.

Because the experiences associated with overcoming her fear of water have so much meaning for her, Margaret has constructed both oral and written



AUTO-BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNTS

Autobiographical accounts (oral and written) are related to journal writing. However, journals capture small fragments of experience; autobiographical accounts paint the broad picture.

For Students

You might ask students to write the story of their lives. More often, however, an autobiography focuses on significant events, years, or themes. Topics suitable for classroom use include: My Life as a Student, A Week I'll Always Remember, My Experiences on the Softball Team, My Career as a Paper Carrier.[4]

For Yourself

- When you share an autobiographical account with your students, you create a bond between you and the students that is personal as well as intellectual.
- Autobiographical accounts of your teaching experiences help you identify how you developed as a teacher. When shared with colleagues, autobiographical accounts can illustrate that all teachers share similar problems and successes. They are a way to learn from each other's experience.

narratives around them. She has described them in detail to several of her friends. She also wrote a story describing these experiences. A few days before her class is scheduled to go swimming, Margaret reads this story to her class and tells them why it has so much meaning for her. As she reads, she notices that Gregory's eyes never leave her face.

At the swimming pool a few days later, Gregory sits on the edge of the pool and watches. After a few minutes, he sits on the edge and dabbles his feet in the water. Although he never actually goes into the water, he appears to be having fun.

When Margaret shared a personal narrative with the students in her class, her immediate purpose was to help Gregory deal with his fear of the water. At the same time, however, she was serving as a role model for her students. Students who see their teachers constructing and using narratives regularly will be more likely to use this medium as a way of giving meaning to their experiences.

Narrative in the Content Areas

Narrative about personal experience allows students to give meaning to that experience, but narrative is also a way that knowledge in the content areas can be summarized by both teachers and students.

In order to construct a story, students must pull together everything they know about a particular event, separate the relevant from the irrelevant, the important from the unimportant, put elements in sequence and offer their own interpretation.

Narrative is particularly useful in the second language classroom because it allows students to express themselves in the language they are studying.

Below are a number of suggestions for narrative activities that might be done by students to support their learning in the content areas. But don't limit this type of narrative to students only. When you are teaching, use stories as a way of conveying factual information in the content areas. The story of "How Josie, the Junk-Food Addict, Smartened Up, Got Fit and Won the Marathon" will remain in students' memories far longer than dozens of lectures about nutrition and physical fitness. Most historical topics make very effective stories.

All of the student suggestions that follow, with minor revisions, can also be used as the subject of a teacher narrative. Remember, when you teach content through the medium of narrative, you also are demonstrating how narratives can be constructed.

All of the suggestions below for content area narratives require that students have some knowledge of the topic. They might obtain this knowledge through independent research or through classroom activities. Content area narratives aren't meant to be exercises in creativity. Rather, their purpose is to provide a structure within

STORYTELLING

For Students

Storytelling provides students with opportunities to tell stories using their own language rather than reading from a text. Students may retell familiar stories or they may tell stories they have read or written. Suggestions for helping children become storytellers include:

- Model storytelling using a story with a simple plot, strong characters and interesting language.
- Discuss the differences between reading a story aloud and telling a story.
- Chart criteria for effective storytelling, emphasizing the importance of voice variations, gestures and expressions.
- Have students rehearse their stories several times in order to internalize the sequence of events.
- Have students tell their stories in pairs or in small groups.
- Record or videotape students' stories. Ask them to use the videotape to identify their strengths and the areas that need improvement.[5]

Storytelling continued

For Yourself

- Use a story format to convey factual information in the content areas when you are teaching.
- Stories are a wonderful tool for sharing your personal experiences with both your students and fellow teachers.

which students can analyze, organize and synthesize factual information.

- ➢ You were in Regina during the Riot of 1935. Write a letter to your mother describing the riot. You can write from the perspective of a rioter, a policeman, a legislator or an onlooker. (This approach can be used with many historic and contemporary events. Ask students to write or tell stories about the event from different perspectives. When students share their narratives, a multidimensional picture of the event will emerge.)
- ➢ You are a member of the Saskatchewan legislature (or a doctor, a nurse, a person in ill health) in 1961. Write a series of at least six journal entries that focus on the establishment of medicare in this province.
- ➢ Write or tell a story that describes a day in the life of a factory worker in England in 1800.
- ➢ Write or tell a story describing a day in the life of a brontosaurus.
- ➢ Imagine that you are the age you are now but are living in Saskatchewan during the Great Depression of the 1920's. Write diary entries covering one week.
- ➢ You are a butterfly. Write or tell your autobiography.
- ➢ You are a citizen of a First Nation and were present at the signing of Treaty No. 6 in 1876. Tell your story.
- ➢ Have students and teacher write accounts describing the learning that took place as a result of a particular lesson or unit.

YOU ARE A BUTTERFLY!

Guiding the Construction of Narratives

With Students

Typically, when children begin constructing narratives, their stories often consist of descriptions of event after event, strung together with the words "and then". The conclusion may come when the storyteller runs out of time or energy and may be signalled by the words "The End".[6]

Through questioning and direct instruction you can help students add detail and structure to their narratives.

Narratives can be structured in many different ways. Some narratives have a beginning, middle and end. Others have neither a beginning nor an end. They are simply a description of a moment in time. Some narratives are rich in detail; others have very little detail.

All narratives are arranged in a sequence. This sequence may be chronological, or it may be in order of importance or according to themes.

In some narratives the same themes are repeated several times and more detail is added with each repetition. In other narratives there is little repetition.

When helping students structure narratives, consider both the purpose of the narrative and its cultural context.

Purpose — A narrative that is intended to convey a lot of factual information will probably have a very different structure than one that is intended to describe an individual's emotions in a particular situation.

Cultural context — Remember that different cultures have different ways of presenting oral and written narratives. Many North American and Western European cultural groups tend to develop narratives that are linear, with a beginning, a middle and an end. There is little or no repetition of themes or ideas within

#2

Refer back to the narrative that you constructed in **Your Turn #1.**

Why is the theme, situation, event or reaction that you described in your narrative meaningful for you?

_____

_____

_____

When constructing your narrative, you selected certain details, events, descriptions, etc., to include. Why did you select the items that you did?

_____

_____

_____

There were probably many details associated with the theme, situation or event described in your narrative that you didn't include. List some of these below.

_____

_____

_____

Why did you decide not to include these details?

_____

_____

PERSONAL JOURNAL WRITING

A journal contains an individual's thoughts, feelings and reflections on various topics or experiences. Journal writing is rarely done to communicate with others. It is used to explore ideas and communicate with oneself.

For Students

- Schedule daily journal writing sessions.
- Students who have little experience with journal writing may benefit from brief discussions about topics or experiences.
- Once students are familiar with journal writing, they should be encouraged to explore topics of their choice.
- A student's writing journal is personal and private. Ask students to choose those entries they will share with you during a conference. At the conference, discuss students' strengths and their need for further growth and achievement, but do not mark or grade the writing.[8]

the narrative. In contrast, some First Nations' stories and some stories from Eastern Europe are iterative. Iterative stories progress in a spiral that adds a little with each repetition of a theme rather than building in a step-by-step linear fashion.[7] Within these cultural traditions, oral narrative may be different from written narrative.

When you are helping students to shape their narratives, be aware that both linear and iterative approaches are equally correct and respect both approaches. The suggestions below for helping students add detail and shape to their narratives will work equally well with a variety of approaches to narrative. Remember, too, that although narratives are most often either oral or written, young children sometimes use drawings to construct narratives.

The examples that follow illustrate how several teachers helped their students structure narratives.

The Reunion

Marion Lebelle, a grade five student, was very excited about the Lebelle family reunion she attended last weekend. Marion's teacher suggested that she construct a narrative about the reunion. In order to help Marion get started her teacher asked her a few questions.

- *Where was the reunion held?*
- *When did the reunion take place — morning, afternoon, evening?*
- *Who was there?*
- *What did you do? What did all the other people there do? What did you eat?*
- *Why did people go to it? Why did you go?*
- *How do you feel about the reunion now that it's over?*

My Dad

Eight-year-old Jodie wrote:

My dad is the person I admire the most. He plays with me and takes me lots of places. We do many things together. Sometimes he gets angry when I do something dumb. He looks after me when I get sick.

Jodie's teacher wanted to help him add detail to his story. She knew that adding detail would give the story depth, richness and colour. She also knew that adding detail would help Jodie develop thinking skills such as grouping ideas and identifying main and supporting ideas, so she asked Jodie the following questions: "What things do you and your dad do when he plays with you?" "Where does he take you?" "What are some of the things you do together?" "What things make your dad mad?" "What does your dad do for you when you're sick?"[9]

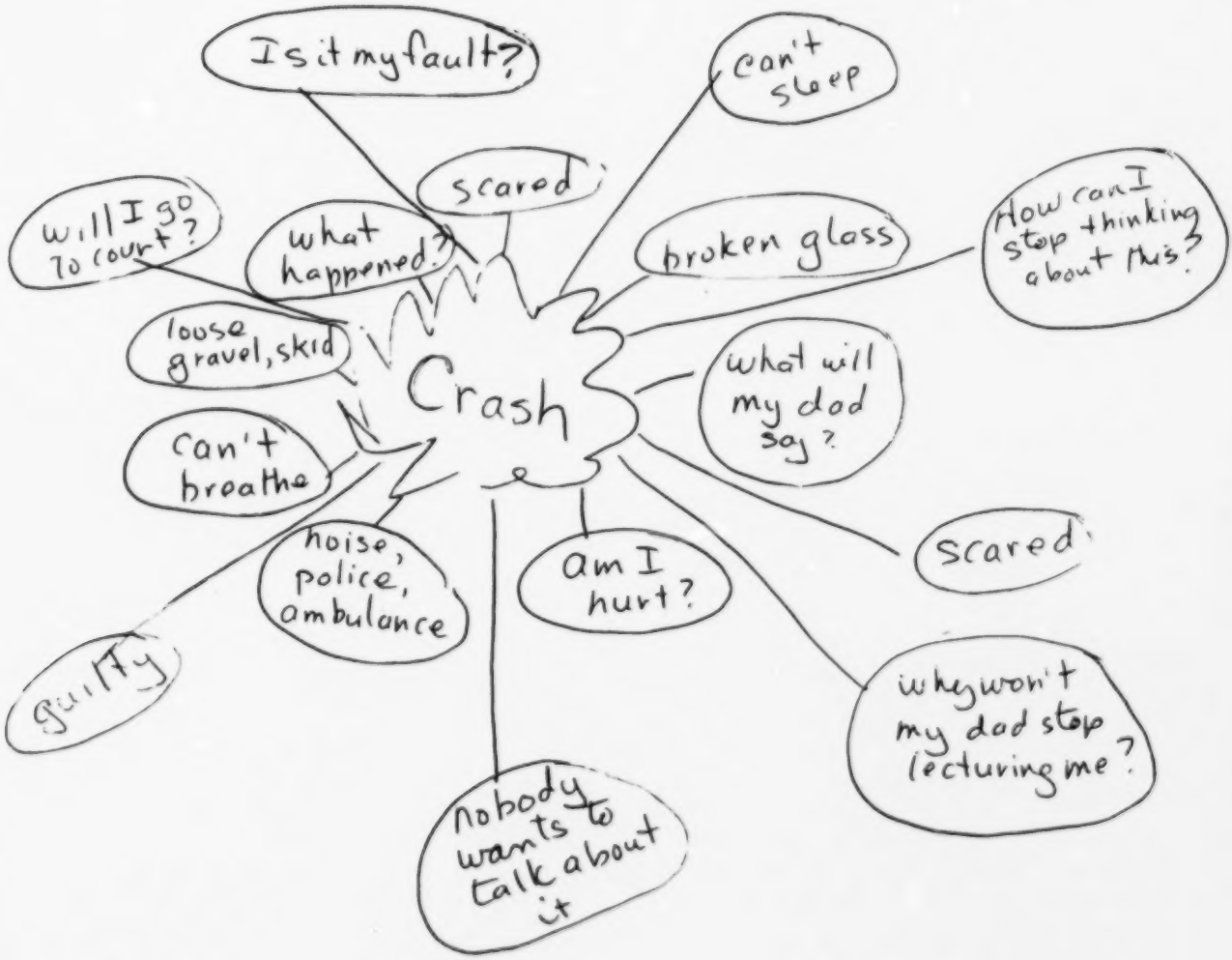
PERSONAL JOURNAL WRITING continued

For Yourself

- Journal writing can be cathartic — a way to express frustration and anger. It is a way to give yourself praise and to recognize your own achievements.
- Analyzing your journal entries, over a period of time, can help you analyze how you handled particular situations and your own responses to situations.
- Analyzing your journal entries may also help you understand yourself better — why you hold certain views about education and children, why you handle certain situations in certain ways.

The Accident

Moira, a grade ten student, was in a car accident last week. She wasn't injured, but she was badly frightened and can't stop thinking about it. She tells her teacher that she wants to write a narrative about the accident, but doesn't know how to organize her thoughts. Her teacher suggests that Moira draw a picture of her thoughts as a starting point. Moira draws the picture below.



The Birthday Party

Harry is a grade two student. He's terribly excited about the birthday party he attended yesterday and so his teacher suggests that he write about it. To help him organize his narrative, his teacher draws three boxes labelled with the words beginning, middle and end. Each box has lines under it.[10] Harry creates the following narrative.

A Mystery at Arlington Beach

Helen Christiansen teaches in the French language teacher education program at the University of Regina. She uses narratives a lot in her teaching. Helen knows that constructing narratives will help her students make sense of their thoughts and experiences as aspiring teachers. Constructing narratives also gives her students practice communicating in French. Because narratives are usually told in the first person or in story format, they give students experience with a different type of communication than do term papers.

Sometimes, Helen encourages her students to construct narratives that aren't based on their personal experience, so that they can practice organizing ideas and communicating in French.

A couple of years ago, she and a group of third-year education students developed such a narrative at Arlington Beach on Last Mountain Lake. The intent was to create a mystery story. The old rundown hotel at Arlington Beach reminded Helen of a favourite mystery writer who said that she always starts with the setting when writing a story. Helen suggested to the students that sitting in the hotel might give them ideas.

Helen asked the students, "Why is this hotel so run down?" "Why didn't it ever fulfil its potential?"

After some discussion, the students decided that the hotel didn't fulfil its potential because the owner was murdered.

Helen's response was to ask more questions, "Who was this owner?" "Where did he come from?" "Did he have a family?" "What were they like?" "Where did he get the money to open this hotel?"

As students responded to each question, they gradually developed a scenario in which the hotel owner was the second son of a wealthy family in Toronto. His wife thought that she had married into a wealthy family and was sadly disappointed to discover that her husband had only enough money to set up a hotel in Saskatchewan. His son, who wanted to be back in Toronto, and he fought constantly. His daughter, whom he had promised in marriage to a wealthy crony, was deeply angry.

Then Helen asked questions about the murder, "When did the murder take place?" "Under what circumstances?" "Where were the members of the family when it took place?" "Were any other people present?"

The students decided that the murder had taken place on July 1, 1929, the day of the official opening of the hotel. It was also the day that the daughter's betrothal to her father's crony would be announced. A big party was planned. The owner's wife was in the garden supervising some local people she had hired to help with the party and

secretly fuming because her husband couldn't afford as grand a party as she would like. The daughter was pouting in her room. The son and his father were arguing loudly in the study about the son's wish to go back to Toronto. Meanwhile, the steamboat that sailed on Last Mountain Lake in those days pulled up to shore and the captain (who was secretly the daughter's true love) and dozens of guests stepped ashore.

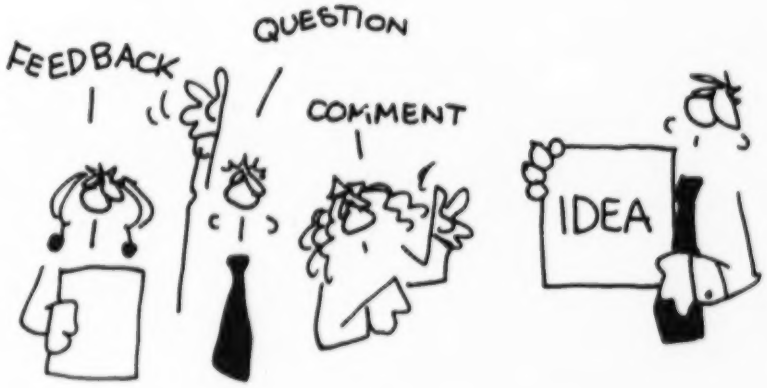
Half an hour later one of the guests went into the hotel and discovered the owner's murdered body. Shortly after that, the hotel closed because there was no money to keep it going and gradually it fell into the sorry state that it is today.

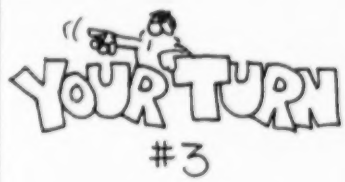
The last questions that Helen asked her students were: "Who killed the owner?" "In this story that we have created, all the evidence points to only one possible murderer. Who was it?"

For Yourself

The five preceding examples all describe ways that you, as a teacher, can help your students structure their narratives. You can use similar techniques when constructing your own personal narratives. Ask yourself questions that will bring out detail. Draw pictures of the ideas and concepts that are important to you before you begin to write. Group your ideas into categories.

You might find it helpful to work with some of your colleagues who also have an interest in constructing narratives. Their questions, comments and feedback will provide objectivity that you probably do not have about your own work. The fact that their point of view may be different from yours will help you think in new ways.





#3

Refer back to the narrative that you constructed in **Your Turn #1.**

When constructing your narrative, you had to organize the events, details, descriptions within it in a sequence (chronological, order of importance, thematically, etc.). How did you sequence your narrative?

_____

_____

_____

Why did you choose this type of sequence?

_____

_____

LETTER WRITING

For Students

Letter writing is more meaningful to students if the letter is going to a real person. Encourage students to write to each other, to you, to relatives or to pen-pals. A letter should reveal something about the person writing it. Students might describe their role in a particular event, such as the school track meet. Letters can focus on thoughts, feelings and impressions as well as on events. Older students might write about their impressions of a particular election campaign. Younger students might describe their feelings when they are served food they don't like. Because the primary purpose of letters is communication with other people, they should be neatly written, and the spelling, grammar and punctuation should be correct.

For Yourself

Sometimes teaching colleagues (even those who work in the same school) use letter writing as a way of sharing and reflecting upon their professional experiences. For many people, putting their thoughts down on paper forces them to analyze their experiences. Receiving feedback from a colleague further supports the process of analysis.

Reflecting on Narrative

With Students

In the classroom, narrative doesn't stop when a child tells or writes a story. Two kinds of follow-up are possible: personal reflection and skill development.

Personal Reflection

Encourage students to reflect on the meaning that their narratives have for them personally. They may wish to ask themselves questions such as:

- How could I respond to similar situations in the future?
- What did I learn from this experience?
- What does this narrative tell me about my likes and dislikes (skills and abilities, strengths, personal tastes, etc.)?
- What does this experience tell me about how I learn new things (handle conflict, deal with stress, etc.)?
- Why is this particular incident meaningful to me?

Skill Development

Skill development has to do with the technical aspects of storytelling or writing. With both oral and written narrative forms, you might ask students to think about questions such as:

- Were the events in the narrative in an appropriate order?
- Did I use enough detail, too much detail, too little detail?
- Was my grammar correct? (A more informal style is appropriate in oral narratives than in written.)
- Did I use expressive words and words that sound good together?

With oral narrative forms, it is often useful to record the student's story on audio or videotape. Students can ask themselves questions such as:

- Did I speak clearly?
- Did the story flow without stumbles or hesitations?
- Did I pause at appropriate places?
- Did I show a variety of facial expressions?
- Did I use gestures effectively?

With written narrative forms, students might want to ask themselves questions such as:

- Are the words spelled correctly?
- Is the punctuation correct?
- Have I used appropriate sentence constructions?

#4

Go back to the narrative that you constructed in **Your Turn #1** and reflect on the narrative.

Ask yourself:

What did I learn from the experience described in my narrative?

_____

_____

_____

How can I apply this learning to my personal life or to my teaching?

_____

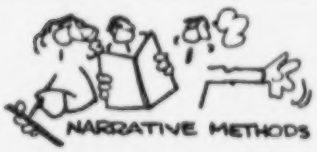
_____

_____

How does this affect my personal life or my teaching?

_____

_____



FAMILY STORIES

Family stories can be oral or written. They are stories handed down across generations about family members and family events.

For Students

A family story, constructed by a student, might focus on the antics of eccentric Great-Uncle George, on Great-Grandma Korchinski who cooked three meals a day for the threshing crew, or on Kokum's experiences during the bad winter of 1925.[11]

For Yourself

Family stories can help you understand how you came to be a teacher and to analyze your attitudes toward children and education. For example, the story of how Grandma taught eight grades during the Depression for $50 per month, but had to quit her job when she got married, most certainly influenced you, even if you aren't aware of that influence.

Valuing Narratives

Students' Narratives

When students tell a story in either oral or written form, they are giving you something of themselves; they are revealing their thoughts, experiences and impressions. Demonstrating, through your actions and words, that you appreciate and value students' stories is the best way to keep those stories coming.

Demonstrating that you value students' narratives is also a way of teaching students to value each other's narratives. Students learn through example as well as through direct instruction.

Create a Positive Environment

- During storytelling, focus your attention entirely on the student who is speaking. Try to think only about what the student is saying.
- Don't interrupt when a student is speaking. If a student speaks slowly, stutters or stumbles over words, resist the temptation to finish her sentences. Let the student speak for herself.
- Wait time and attitudes toward silence vary among cultures. Give a student as much time as he needs to respond. Don't assume that a student who doesn't respond immediately has nothing to say.

Give Everyone Equal Opportunity

- When students are telling stories in a group, give each one an opportunity to speak. Make it clear that students can decide for themselves whether they wish to speak. Don't force those students who decline the opportunity.
- Give everyone equal time. Setting a timer is a good way to ensure this.

➢ Treat female and male students equally. Give them the same amount of time to speak and assign the same topics to both genders. When female and male students select different topics for their narratives, treat all topics with equal respect and expect students to do the same.

Treat Each Other's Narratives with Respect

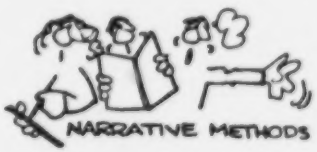
➢ Storytelling is often done in small groups or in pairs. Insist that listeners show respect for each other's narratives — no interruptions and no put-downs. Strive to make courteous and attentive listening the norm.

Respect Students' Wishes Regarding the Audience for their Narratives

➢ Some narratives, like journal entries, are personal and private. Students decide which sections of their journal will be shown to you and to their fellow students. Letters are intended to be read by at least one other person. Stories (both written and oral) are usually intended to be shared with others. Ask students permission before sharing their narratives beyond the intended audience.

Treat Personal Information as Confidential

➢ Many narratives are drawn from incidents or experiences in an individual's life. In the process of constructing narratives, students will sometimes reveal their own thoughts and feelings, and incidents from their home life. Treat these revelations as confidential. Do not share them with anyone else without the student's permission. The exception to this rule is when a student's narrative reveals physical or sexual abuse. In this case, you are legally required to report the abuse to the appropriate officials. Most schools have developed a procedure that must be followed when a child reveals that s/he has been abused.



RESPONSE JOURNALS

Response journals are a cross between personal journals and letter writing. In a response journal, two people exchange thoughts, impressions and experiences on particular topics or issues. The entries in the journal can be as long or as short as the participants wish.

For Students

The writers of a response journal can be student and teacher or two students. The topic is often the student's experiences with schooling. Guidance counsellors sometimes use response journals as a way of giving support and feedback to students who seek their counsel.

For Yourself

Two teachers who are exploring the same or similar topics sometimes find that response journals allow them to consider their thoughts in a way that is not possible with oral conversation. The response journal also allows experienced teachers to mentor beginning teachers in a consistent, personal and direct fashion.

Traditional Narratives

You may want to use the traditional narratives of Saskatchewan's First Nations peoples in your classroom. When you do, ensure that these narratives are presented appropriately.

- **Treat traditional stories with respect.** Avoid use of terms such as "legend", "myth" and "folktale" when referring to First Nations stories. These terms imply that the stories are not true. From a First Nations perspective, the stories which explain the origins of the cosmos, of ceremonies, of humanity and of the natural world form the underpinnings of a spiritual belief system and a world view that is seen to be true by those who embrace it.
- **Familiarize yourself with the customs associated with traditional stories.** For example, for many First Nations across the prairies, certain stories are associated with certain seasons. Before inviting Elders and storytellers into the classroom, check with knowledgeable people about how the Elder should be introduced, addressed and thanked. If you wish to learn to tell traditional stories yourself, it may be appropriate to get permission from the storyteller.[12]

Evaluating Narratives

The section of this booklet that is titled "Why Use Narrative?" noted that narrative can be used for many different purposes in the classroom. The way that narratives are evaluated should be directly tied to the purpose of the narrative.

Personal Narratives

One of the main purposes of writing or telling a personal story is to get a deeper understanding of yourself, your experiences and the world around you. Determining the extent to which this has been achieved is better accomplished through self-evaluation and self-reflection than through external evaluation. You can **help your students reflect upon and explore the contents of their narratives by encouraging them to re-story their stories** — to retell their stories with more depth and detail.

Some questions that you might ask as students re-story their stories include:

- ➢ Why did you choose to tell this story?
- ➢ If you were to tell the story again what would you add?
- ➢ Do you remember how you felt when this happened? How do you feel about it now?
- ➢ What happened when . . . ?
- ➢ Tell me more about . . . .
- ➢ What did you learn from this?
- ➢ What do you think someone else might learn from your story?

When you are commenting on students' narratives, **avoid criticizing the content or meaning of a narrative**. Criticizing students' stories is a quick way to turn off the flow of stories. When a student shares part

TALKING CIRCLES

Talking circles are useful when you want to encourage people to share feelings and aren't looking for a right answer. They can be used by both students and teachers.

First, appoint a facilitator. The facilitator's role is to ensure that everyone will be heard and accepted without criticism. Everyone is free to react to the topic under discussion, subject to the following conditions:

- Comments should be about the topic under discussion not about others in the talking circle.
- One person speaks at a time. The others listen without comment.
- No one is required to speak if s/he doesn't want to.
- Everyone is welcome to speak, but must not monopolize the conversation.
- The facilitator avoids comments such as "good" or "interesting" that might be interpreted as evaluative.
- People aren't allowed to put themselves down by saying things like, "I don't know very much about this."[13]

of his or her life with you in the form of a story, make neutral, accepting comments such as "Thank you for your story about your visit to Wanuskewin Heritage Park. I've never been there so that's something I can still look forward to."

Use praise cautiously. Praise, like criticism, is a form of judgement. Students whose self-confidence is low, and some younger students, benefit from praise. However, excessive praise may encourage children to work for your approval rather than for the satisfaction of a job well done. Never simply say, "That was a good story," as this comment doesn't provide any information that will be useful to the student in the future. When you praise, be specific. You might say, "I enjoyed that story because you used words that start with the same letter very effectively. We call that alliteration." "One strength of your story was the way that you organized what you wanted to say. Everything flowed in a logical order." "I learned a lot about Banff from listening to the story of your trip there."

When providing students with comments on their personal narratives, **it may be appropriate to address technical details** such as grammar, punctuation and spelling. However, never let these technical aspects overshadow the main purpose of the activity which is to convey meaning.

Content Area Narratives

Sometimes students summarize and synthesize their learnings in a particular subject area in the form of a narrative. In these situations, it is appropriate to assess whether the information presented is correct or appropriate. For example, if a student were writing a story about a factory worker during the Industrial Revolution, that student should be able to accurately describe the working conditions of the times, the type of equipment used in the factory, the modes of transportation used by people going to work, and the existence of child labour.

Dear Loraine:

Thanks for your letter. Your story about how your skiing experiences made you think about the way that we define success and failure in schools really struck a chord with me. I've had a couple of similar experiences during the past two years that I've been working as a guidance counsellor.

I'm thinking of one student, in particular, who's been in my office several times. He's "failing" in most of his subjects and his attitude seems to be, "What's the point? I know I can't do it." When he talks about his past experiences with school it's obvious that he's someone who needs extra time to learn — time that the system hasn't allowed him.

This student has challenged me to consider what I can do. I can't change the entire system, but my job does give me considerable influence. Right now I'm talking to the principal about two possibilities — a peer-tutoring program and a modular approach to a couple of math and English courses. My idea is that the modules would be very small — one to three hours of work — and would focus on specific skills so that students experience many small successes. Things are looking promising so far; we'll see what happens.

See you soon.

Barb

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In this classic, Bruner suggests that there are two modes of thought – the paradigmatic or logico-scientific mode and the narrative mode. The narrative mode deals with human intention and action. It allows us to give meaning to our experiences and to put those experiences into a broader human context.

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Gudmundsdottir suggests that narrative is 'many teachers' solution to a special teacher's problem; that is translating 'knowing into talking.' Teachers do this by using two types of stories - curriculum stories which unify theory, themes and specific events into larger units, and shorter stories told as explanations or illustrations.

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